



*A program of works by*  
*ARTHUR GOTTSCHALK*  
*GUNTHER SCHULLER*  
*and*  
*YEHUDI WYNER*

*Thursday, January 27, 2011*  
*8:00 p.m.*  
*Lillian H. Duncan Recital Hall*

*Celebrating* 1975-2010  
*35* *Years*

THE SHEPHERD SCHOOL OF MUSIC RICE UNIVERSITY

## PROGRAM

### ***Quartet for Doublebasses (1947)***

*Gunther Schuller*  
(b. 1925)

*Allegro moderate*

*Allegro scherzando*

*Adagio*

*Kevin Brown, double bass*  
*Emily Honeyman, double bass*  
*Patrick Staples, double bass*  
*Timothy Pitts, double bass*

### ***Quartet for Oboe and String Trio (1999)***

*Yehudi Wyner*  
(b. 1929)

*Robert Atherholt, oboe*  
*Sonja Harasim, violin*  
*Joshua Kelly, viola*  
*Christopher French, violoncello*

## INTERMISSION

### ***Sonata for Horn and Piano (2006)***

*Arthur Gottschalk*  
(b. 1952)

*I.*

*II. Dirge*

*III.*

*William VerMeulen, horn*  
*Brian Connelly, piano*

### ***Trio 2009 (2009)***

*Yehudi Wyner*

*Michael Webster, clarinet*  
*Norman Fischer, violoncello*  
*Yehudi Wyner, piano*

## PROGRAM NOTES

### **Quartet for Doublebasses** . . . . . Gunther Schuller

The **Quartet for Doublebasses** was composed in 1947, with some revisions in the last movement in 1959. When presented to a well-known bass teacher and "virtuoso" in 1948, it was declared unplayable and the aberrant meanderings of a French-horn playing composer who didn't know how to write for the bass. I look upon this somewhat bemusedly today, but at the time this rejection of my labor of love on behalf of the bass fraternity and the dearth of serious bass literature depressed me considerably. But then, these things were not unusual in the 1940s — when composers more or less expected not to get performed, unlike today when one has a reasonable expectation of performance of almost any new chamber work with our hundreds of university symposia, arts festivals and contemporary performing groups.

In any event, my bass quartet was taken up many years later — in 1959 — by Fred Zimmerman and a group of dedicated young bass players who subsequently gave the first performance of the work under my direction in Carnegie Recital Hall in the spring of 1960. It has since been widely performed all over the world.

The quartet is nothing more than an attempt to write a non-compromising serious piece for four basses, just as one might normally write a string quartet. It is far removed from the genre and character pieces that have weighted down the bass repertory for decades and centuries.

The work is in three movements. The first, largely homophonic in concept, groups the four basses into various combinations (two parts, one player accompanied by the other three, etc.). It may be of interest that the initial high-register opening chord, played tremolo, is identical to the last sounds in the fourth movement of Schönberg's Opus 16, **Five Pieces for Orchestra**; and in a sense, the entire bass quartet was inspired by and evolved from that single chord, which seemed to me in 1947 (and still does) such an extraordinarily daring instrumental conception for 1909, when Schönberg's work was written.

The second movement is a scherzo, complete with a trio (in sustained chords in double-stop harmonics). The third movement is an adagio, including a cadenza-like section featuring the first bass in the highest register, a jazz-pizzicato section, and fade-away coda.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the quartet and its only truly innovative contribution is the special tuning of the basses in the second and third movements. Each bass has a different tuning, thus enabling me to avoid the endless quartal harmonies and double-stops limited to fourths and fifths that afflict so much bass literature. Perhaps the most striking example of the possibilities permitted by such retuning of the strings is the eight-part chord in harmonics in the third movement, a chord literally not possible in harmonics with the conventional tuning.

— Note by the composer



**Quartet for Oboe and String Trio . . . . . Yehudi Wyner**

Without the enterprise of the eminent oboist Peggy Pearson, the *Quartet for Oboe and String Trio* might not have come into being. She made it plain that she wanted a piece from me, proposed the instrumental makeup of the ensemble, and proceeded to put together a consortium of players and organizations to commission the work. The Quartet was begun during summer of 1999 and completed in December. The premiere by consortium members began in February 2000 and performances continued throughout that year. The Boston premiere took place on 1 April 2000, with Pearson, violinist Bayla Keyes, violist Mary Ruth Ray, and cellist Rhonda Rider.

The *Quartet* is in one single movement lasting about 25 minutes. As the music unfolds, we find ourselves in zones of clearly defined character: lyric, passionate, passive, frenetic, antic, melacholic, or meditative. Unexpected disjunctions and transformations are the rule.

Much of the structure of the *Quartet* is governed by variation technique. A ground-bass introduction by the 'Cello fairly early on anchors the framework for a succession of episodes of unequal length and changing character. Later on, a loosely assembled succession of variations organizes much of the second half of the composition. Such observations about the private technical methods of the composer do not begin to touch on the essential matter of the *Quartet* – which is to create a coherent succession of dramatic and expressive events whose purpose is to embrace a large world of experience and to find ways to illuminate and to share the world.

– Note by the composer

**Sonata for Horn and Piano . . . . . Arthur Gottschalk**

The *Sonata for Horn and Piano* was composed in 2006, as a part of an ongoing series of multi-movement recital pieces, and almost immediately dropped below my radar as I tackled a number of commissions for works of a larger scale. I am profoundly grateful, however, that this delay has resulted in a premiere performance by musicians who are among the finest exponents of their instruments. Sometimes good things do, indeed, come to those who wait.

This sonata, like other works in the series, has a basic three-movement shape, consisting of a slow middle movement surrounded by activity of a quicker character. The first movement is a nod towards the recital pieces that brass players first cut their adult teeth on, the *pièce de concours* designed to demonstrate a mastery of standard technique and a progress towards virtuosity. The second movement, subtitled *Dirge*, begins quietly and monotonously, and slowly and relentlessly descends into an abyss of sadness and pain. The phenomenal range of the instrument is exploited, and in particular the lesser-used lowest area of the horn. The third movement is a scherzo, a veritable toy-box of techniques, tricks, charm and chicanery in which the horn and piano construct an amusement park ride for the ears. It is also, needless to say, fiendishly difficult.

– Note by the composer

**Trio 2009** . . . . . Yehudi Wyner

*Trio for Clarinet, Cello, and Piano* was commissioned by Chamber Music San Francisco, in 2008, for a concert to feature Richard Stoltzman, Lynn Harrell, and Robert Levin, three musical giants who had never before played together. About this commission, the composer writes:

*"Time was short between the confirmed request for the Trio and the target date for delivery of the manuscript, and so I chose to seek out a congenial but isolated place to stimulate my creative concentration. By extraordinary good fortune I was invited to be artist in residence at a remarkable Foundation in Umbria, Italy, a 15th century castle-retreat called Civitella Ranieri. There, in the midst of olive groves and mountains, sympathetic colleagues and a serene atmosphere, I was able to work happily and the Trio took shape.*

*For two of the performers, Robert Levin and Richard Stoltzman, I had written a substantial amount of music. But while I know well the magisterial art of Lynn Harrell, I'd never had the privilege of writing for him. Bringing these three artists and friends together to collaborate on a composition of mine was therefore a thrilling moment for me.*

*The Trio is in one continuous movement and is typical of my music in that it proclaims no exclusive ideology. While the music is continuous it traverses sections of clear variety, featuring now one, now another player. There are short episodes of recitative for Cello, a romantic ballad-like cantilena for Clarinet and a brief pseudo cadenza for Piano. But most of the music moves quickly and in concerted texture. Towards the end a slow dirge-like episode darkens and deepens the expression."*

— Note by the composer